

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 01753 131715Z

42

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

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SECDEF

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 1753

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, VE

SUBJ: VENEZUELAN NAVAL PLANS

SUMMARY. THE VENEZUELAN NAVY'S PLANS FOR 1976 INCLUDE PARTICIPATION IN AN AMBITIOUS SERIES OF NAVAL EXERCISES AND RECEIPT OF TWO NEW GERMAN SUBMARINES. THESE SIGNS OF ACTIVITY BY THE FORMERLY MORIBUND VENEZUELAN NAVY INDICATE THAT THE GOV PLANS TO DEVELOP A MORE CREDIBLE AND CAPABLE NAVAL FORCE. END SUMMARY.

1. ON FEBRUARY 11, THE NEW COMMANDER OF THE VENEZUELAN NAVY, VICE ADMIRAL FELIX MENDOZA ACOSTA, PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THE NAVY'S PLANS FOR 1976. THE FACT OF SUCH AN ANNOUNCEMENT WAS PREDICTABLE SINCE MENDOZA'S PREDECESSOR MADE A SIMILAR PUBLIC STATEMENT WHEN HE ASSUMED THE NAVAL COMMANDANT POSITION. WHAT WAS UNUSUAL WAS THE AMBITIOUS CHARACTER OF ADMIRAL MEDOZA'S PLANS FOR THE YEAR.

2. HE PREDICTED THAT VENEZUELA WOULD RECEIVE BY THE END OF THE YEAR TWO SUBMARINES CONSTRUCTED IN WEST GERMANY. HE  
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PAGE 02 CARACA 01753 131715Z

ALSO STATED THAT THE VENEZUELAN NAVY WILL PARTICIPATE IN

OPERATION "SPRINGBOARD," IN THE NEXT OPERATION "UNITAS," IN THE BICENTENNIAL GREAT NAVAL REVIEW IN NEW YORK, AND IN A VENEZUELAN AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISE, OPERATION "CAIMAN." HE ALSO RECALLED THAT VENEZUELA HAD ORDERED SIX FRIGATES FROM THE ITALIAN FIRM, "CANTIERI NAVALI RIUNITI."

3. COMMENT: THE VENEZUELAN NAVY HAS A WELL-ESTABLISHED REPUTATION FOR LOW PERFORMANCE, DUE TO ILL-TRAINED PERSONNEL, DISORGANIZATION, AND INADEQUATE MAINTENANCE SYSTEMS. THE AMBITIOUS EXERCISE PROGRAM OUTLINED BY ADMIRAL MENDOZA THUS REPRESENTS AN UNACCUSTOMED CHALLENGE TO THE NAVY TO IMPROVE RADICALLY UPON ITS PREVIOUS PERFORMANCE AND TO DEVELOP THE ABILITY TO OPERATE AWAY FROM VENEZUELAN WATERS FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. CONSIDERED TOGETHER WITH VENEZUELA'S RECENT PURCHASE OF SIX ITALIAN FRIGATES (75 CARACAS 11213)--THE LARGEST ARMS PURCHASE IN LATIN AMERICA IN 1975--ADMIRAL MENDOZA'S PLANS INDICATE THAT THE GOV IS GIVING HIGH PRIORITY TO DEVELOPING A MORE MODERN AND EFFECTIVE NAVAL FORCE, CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING VENEZUELA'S POLICY OF GREATER ACTIVITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN AREA. SHLAUDEMAM

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